

ANNEX 3

RECENT TRENDS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL-URBAN
MIGRATIONS IN WESTERN EUROPE

Summary of Working Paper

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Definition of Western Europe

"Western Europe" is a rather vague term. Sometimes it is used for the countries around the North Sea, sometimes it is used for the highly industrialized countries in Europe West of Poland, Hungary and Yugoslavia, including for instance Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Italy, at least northern Italy. In this paper it means, for practical reasons, the whole of the non-socialist countries of Europe, thus the Scandinavian countries, the United Kingdom, Ireland, the Benelux countries, Western Germany, France, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, Spain and Portugal. Though some aspects of the conditions in Spain, Portugal and southern Italy will be discussed in the following, the main emphasis will be given to the strongly industrialized, high-income part of Western Europe in this sense.

Rural-urban migration after World War II

While rural-urban migration in Western Europe has a long historical tradition and is often associated with the industrial revolution of the 19th century, it developed a new pattern since World War II. Since, however, that new pattern developed gradually, and since social scientists during the first post-war decade, were preoccupied with other interests, it is only towards the end of the 1950's that the new pattern became evident and the object of scientific investigation.

Precise information on the qualitative aspects of rural-urban migration is still defective in many respects, and comparative studies difficult, not in the least because there is no clear and generally accepted definition of which human settlements are "urban" and which are "rural", this definition varying from country to country. Some countries now use the criterion of the percentage of a settlement's inhabitants directly or indirectly engaged in agricultural pursuits to determine whether the settlement in question is a rural or an urban one; elsewhere, the distinction is based on one of such traditional criteria as the size of a settlement's population and legal or administrative determination.

The limitation of the published statistical data on internal migration to the number of migrants per year and to the breakdown of these national totals by administrative districts of emigration and immigration, as well as by sex and age groups (with, sometimes allowance for information on the marital status of the migrants) is another obstacle in the way of serious study of the migratory movements. Information about the character (urban or rural, whatever the distinction between these types may be in a particular country) of the municipalities of emigration and immigration is almost never published, the same applies to data on other social, economic and cultural characteristics of the migrants.

Because of this insufficiency of the migration statistics and the lack of co-ordination between census data and migration data, the decrease of the number of persons economically active in the field of agriculture is sometimes used as a kind of statistical substitute for figures on the magnitude of rural-urban migration. Though these figures may give some indication, it is clear that they have in this respect only a limited value. The main objection is, of course, that changing your occupation does not necessarily mean, that you change also your residence. Especially in the period after World War II thousands of agrarians have changed their profession, while they are still living in the same place as before.

Through this and other indirect methods enough is known, however, about the new type of rural-urban migration in Western Europe since World War II to set forth its main characteristics:

1. For the first time since statistical data are available, rural-urban migration causes an absolute decline in rural population figures. In the past, while rural-urban migration caused the rural population to grow at a slower rate than the urban population, the rural population still increased in absolute figures; in most countries of Western Europe, this is no more the case.
2. Owing to the decline in rural population figures, the Western European countryside is less and less able to fulfil its traditional role as the source of additional manpower for industry and urban services. This phenomenon is particularly striking in those countries where the percentage of the population deriving its livelihood from agriculture is already lower than 10% of the total population, (and where this percentage is likely to undergo a further decline). This fact, together with the rapid economic growth of the highly industrialized areas of Western Europe creates a manpower shortage leading, on the one hand, to the automatization of productive and clerical

activities lending themselves to this change, and, on the other, to massive immigration into these areas of additional labour from the less developed areas of Southern Europe and such non-European areas as North-West Africa and the West Indies.

3. The term "rural-urban migration" would presuppose the existence of two separate and distinct types of communities. This was actually the situation before World War II (although, in some countries, the hitherto sharp differences between the two kinds of settlements were beginning to get blurred even in the 1920's). Since World War II, owing largely to the development on a massive scale of individual and merchandise transportation by automobile, an additional type of settlement has come into existence, namely the modern suburb, while most of the persons migrating to the suburbs are former city-dwellers, many are former villagers. In countries where suburbs (or at least a sizeable part of them) are administratively classified as rural areas, an under-statement of the extent of rural-urban migration may result, since, in such countries, migrants from rural areas to suburbs would not be statistically noticed even though the economic activity and the culture of the suburbs is urban.
4. Another under-statement of the extent of urbanization, as expressed in rural-urban migration, results from the rapid increase of commutation travel since World War II, another phenomenon made possible by the development of individual transport by automobile. Since commutation to work has become a technically feasible and socially accepted way of life, many rural dwellers attracted by the economic advantages of work in urban areas who in earlier times would have to move to the cities, continue to live in their rural communities but commute to work, thus becoming part and parcel of urban economic life. For Statistical purposes, however, they continue to be villagers.
5. To the extent to which, in Western Europe, rural-urban migration takes place within the same country, its social and cultural impact on the migrants has lost much of its former vigour. This is due to the diminishing social distance between town and countryside as expressed in the acceptance by the rural population of the essential elements of urban culture, following the changing proportion between the rural and urban element in the total population; once the urban population had become the majority, its cultural

and social behaviour has achieved the status of a "norm" to be generally followed. In more practical terms, this trend is furthered by the standardization of education through the rise in the level of the rural schools (including the spread of secondary education in rural areas), the identity of popular information and popular entertainment dispensed by the unified (or, at least, co-ordinated) radio and television systems, the ease of access by rural people to models of urban life through mass media, and by the increasing availability to the rural population of merchandise identical in quality, brand and price to that generally used by the urban population.